Utah Tribes - Navajo (Dine')

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History

WINDOW ROCK, Navajo Nation (Ariz.) – The Navajos are the largest and most populous Native American nation with about 270,000 members, of which 165,614 live within the Navajo Nation borders.

Spanning Arizona, New Mexico and Utah, the Navajo Nation covers 17 million acres and constitutes one-third of all Indian lands in the lower 48 states. Covering almost 26,110 square miles, it is slightly larger than West Virginia (24,231 square miles, with 1,825,754 people) or about one-quarter the area of Arizona (114,006 square miles, with 4,428,068 people). It is

larger than Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Massachusetts and Rhode Island combined.

Sovereignty is embodied in the official seal of the Navajo Nation, which has 50 arrowheads in an unbroken circle around the outside of the seal to symbolize the Navajo Nation's protection within the 50 states of the United States. Inside the arrowheads are three concentric lines, blue for the outside line, yellow in the middle and red on the inside, symbolizing the rainbow of sovereign protection of the Navajo Nation. The lines are open at the top, which is the east; just below that is the sun, rising in the east and shining on the four sacred mountains. In the center, a sheep, horse and a cow symbolize the traditional livestock economy for the Navajo people; at the bottom, two green plants are corn which is the age-old basic food of Navajo life. The corn plants are tipped with yellow pollen, which is still widely used in traditional Navajo ceremonies.

The traditional Navajo land is encompassed within the Four Sacred Mountains that were created by the Holy People for the Navajos. In the east is 'Sisnaajinii,' – Mt. Blanca; in the south, 'Tsoodzil,' – Mount Taylor. Near Grants, New Mexico; in the west 'Dook'o'oosliid,' – San Francisco Peak, near Flagstaff, Arizona; and in the north, 'Dibe' Nitsaa,' – Mt. Hesperus. On the Navajo Nation seal, Sisnaajinii is white, representing White Shell Woman in the east; Tsoodzil is blue, representing Turquoise Woman in the south; Dook'o'oosliid is yellow, representing Abalone Woman in the west; and Dibe' Nitsaa is black, representing Jet Woman to the north.

The attitude of the Navajo to their land was eloquently expressed by Barboncito, at the signing of the Treaty of 1868 in Eastern New Mexico where they had been exiled since 1864: "....When the Navajos were first created, four mountains and four rivers were pointed out to us, inside of which we should live. That was to be our country and it was given to us by the First Woman of the Dine. It was told to us by our forefathers that we were never to move east of the Rio Grande or north of the San Juan rivers . First Woman, when she was created, gave us this piece of land and created it especially for us and gave us the whitest of corn. I hope you will not ask us to go to any other country except my own."

Linguistically, the Navajo are related to the Apaches, and to the Athabascans (the Dene) of northern Canada. The Dene in northern Canada were sometimes known as the Dine Nahotloni, the 'People of another place.' A matrilineal society, where clan relationships are still important, their traditional arts consist of finely woven blankets, richly detailed silver and turquoise jewelry, and a distinct style of painting based on "sandpaintings" originally used in healing ceremonies.

Navajo Nation lands include beautiful and varied landscapes ranging from arid deserts below 4,000 feet to 10,500-foot high mountain peaks forested with pine, fir and aspen. The continental climate has cold winters, hot summers, and average annual precipitation ranging from less than 6 inches to more than 20 inches in the mountains. Usual temperatures range from 0 degrees Fahrenheit to the mid-80s, but can drop as low as -30 degrees F., and may reach 100 degrees during the hottest summer days, but these extremes are rare.

The land is endowed with significant renewable and non-renewable natural resources, including surface and ground waters, rangelands, prairies and forests, dry and irrigated farmlands, fish and wildlife, plus substantial reserves of coal, oil, natural gas and uranium.

Despite its significant economic potential, socio-economic conditions on the Navajo Nation are comparable to those found in some underdeveloped third world countries. According to the 1990 Census, about 56 percent of Navajo people who live below the poverty level compared to 13 percent for the United States. The average annual per capita income for a Navajo person is \$4,106, compared to the national average of \$19,082 in 1990. Unemployment ranges from 36 percent to over 50 percent seasonally.

Many of these conditions are attributed to a lack of infrastructure, which is directly related to the failure of the federal government to meet its trust and treaty obligations. For example, the Navajo Nation has 2,000 miles of paved roads, West Virginia has more than 18,000 miles. Similarly, many Navajo homes lack electricity, running water, telephones, or all of those basic services.

The greatest resource of the Navajo Nation is the people. It is a youthful people, about 50 percent of the people are under 25 years of age. It is why the Hale administration has emphasized education, scholarships and development of youth as extremely important to the future of the people, with Pres. Hale often dubbed "the education president."

Due to economic conditions, the Navajo Nation is losing population to off-reservation areas; while the on-reservation population grew by 22 percent from 1980 to 1990, the off-reservation population in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah grew by 124.5 percent. Navajo population in the other 47 states grew by 71.4 percent. In common with much of America, rural areas of the Navajo Nation are losing population. During the 1980s, 34 chapters lost population to larger Navajo communities or off-reservation areas. If this trend continues, by 2012 about half of the Navajo people will live outside the Navajo Nation. By the 2020 Census, when by a "moderate growth scenario"

the Navajo population is expected to reach 585,000, about 53.5 percent will live in off-reservation areas.

Educational statistics for Navajo students indicate performance levels below the figures for America's worst urban and rural educational systems. Schools serving Navajo children - primarily Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools, and public schools under the jurisdiction of the states of Arizona, New Mexico and Utah - offer inconsistent and often culturally insensitive curricula.

This year, in addresses to the Arizona and New Mexico legislatures, President Hale asked that Native American history be added to the school curriculum to provide outsiders with an understanding of culture, heritage, tradition and current conditions of Navajos and other Indian nations.

Most of the BIA and state dominated schools fail to provide Navajo students with the educational and social opportunities they need and deserve. The Navajo Nation government and its people do not possess the requisite authority to address the bulk of these problems due to the unique tri-state jurisdictional status. However, the Division of Dine' Education has developed innovative programs to teach Navajo language, history and culture and these programs are now being made available to schools with substantial enrollments of Navajo students.

During the past year, President Hale has become a national leader in the effort to define Native American sovereignty. In part, his efforts are an answer to attempts by Senator Slade Gorton, R-Wash., to limit the independence of Native Americans. In his January report to the Navajo Nation Council, President Hale cited: ". . . giving the Navajo People the tools they need to protect and enhance their prosperity and sovereignty.

"It is not the government that is sovereign, it is people who are sovereign".

"We are very fortunate that we still have our language, our land, our culture and a distinctly Navajo government. We should never face the day when the Navajo People are in the position of having lost one or more of these basic elements of sovereignty. Yet, despite the pledge by President Clinton to respect our rights and consult with us on a nation-to-nation basis, our sovereign rights are still under constant attack by federal, state and local officials.

"Sovereignty is the right of Navajos to make the decisions that affect Navajos, ourselves as individuals, and all of us as the Navajo Nation. It is the Native American people who are sovereign. This effort to define our sovereignty has become national movement. Much of the founding work comes from the first sovereignty conference held in our hoganin our Museum in Window Rock last November. We salute the wisdom of those Indian nation leaders who gathered. The Navajo Nation is a national leader in this effort. Because the 557 federally recognized Indigenous nations are so individual, distinct and independent, we may never come up with one definition to define sovereignty for all Native Americans.

"However, are sending a clear message to all levels of government officials: 'Respect for actions consistent with Native American sovereignty is the basis of a beneficial government-to-government relationship with the United States, individual states, and local communities.' Our sovereignty is not a gift from anyone. It is ours because as Native Americans we were here first, we are still here and we will always be her. It is our people who are sovereign.

"Our people cannot be happy without freedom. We cannot be free without sovereignty. We cannot be sovereign if our earth, water, air and fire are controlled by others. Our future must focus on our rights instead of the dependency imposed by outsiders. Sovereignty is ours, earned by our ancestors who lived here from time immemorial. Sovereignty is ours, it belongs to our people, it is not a gift delegated to us from others.

"Much wisdom has come from the Navajo Nation Council in affirming, protecting and enhancing the sovereignty of the Navajo People. Our ongoing discussions about a definition of sovereignty is one of the tools to strengthen the Navajo People, and all Native Americans.

"We are leaders because we have not lost our traditions, our heritage, our culture and our religion. We are leaders because we are Navajo. We are the Nohookaa Diyin Dine. We urge you to remain committed to this issue, because protecting our sovereignty protects the future of the Navajo People."

In support of this spirit, President Hale has repeatedly emphasized the Navajo Nation "is committed to achieving and ensuring the full range of social, environmental and economic conditions that will enable the prosperity and well-being of present and future generations of Navajo people.

"Someday, every Navajo residence will have adequate housing, electricity, running water, solid waste disposal facilities; and will enjoy the benefits of diverse, productive and healthy natural resources.

"Someday, every Navajo individual will have the same ready access to community and health care facilities and educational and economic

opportunities now taken for granted in every part of the United States. To achieve this, the Federal government must live up to its trust and treaty commitments.

"The Navajo Nation seeks to empower the Navajo people with the abilities and resource to revitalize and strengthen their own rural communities and sustainable economies. This vision of Navajo rural development balances and integrates the opportunities and needs of all development sectors, and builds on the foundation of Navajo cultural values and traditions."

Other Resources

The Dine' (Navajo Nation) Today - Utah Indian Affairs

Navajo Tribe Chapter List - Utah Indian Affairs